

**NORTHEASTERN GREAT BASIN
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
February 4, & 5, 1999
Elko, Nevada**

RAC Members

Present:

Category

Kathy Ataman	(2)
Steve Boies	(1)
Eric Daniels	(1)
Bob Edwards	(1)
Brent Eldridge, Chairman	(3)
Vince Garcia	(3)
Lynn Huntsinger	(3)
James Matheus	(2)
Merlin McColm	(2)
Bob McGinty	(2)
DeLoyd Satterthwaite	(1)
Patsy Sue Tomera	(3)
Bill Upton	(1)

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representatives:

Bob Abbey	D.M. Reno
Patrick Coffin	USFWS
Gene Kolkman	F.M. Ely
Helen Hankins	F.M. Elko
Eric Luse	A.F.M. Ely
Gene Marchetti	Rep. for Congressman Gibbons
Bob Miller	Environmental Coordinator
John Owens	SPPCO

Steve Smith
Jeff Weeks
Walter Wehrkamp
JoLynn Worley
Curtis Tucker
Anita Swails

Wilderness
A.F.M. Battle Mtn.
SPPCO
Public Affairs Spec. Reno
Special Projects Coordinator, Ely
Office Automation Clerk, Ely

The February 4 and 5, 1999 meeting of the Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council was called to order by Chairman Brent Eldridge. Welcome and introduction of board members commenced, followed by the first order of business.

Approval of minutes from the October 16, 1998 Resource Advisory Council meeting.

I. WILD HORSE & BURRO STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

DeLoyd Satterthwaite initiated discussion regarding the outcome and results from state-wide studies conducted by the Wild Horse Commission. How will the proposed changes affect the national program? Bob Abbey explained the Wild Horse Commission identified several recommendations for the Bureau of Land Management to augment in respect to the Wild Horse and Burro Act. The issues to address primarily in relation to marketing wild horses and burros, (in the state of Nevada) include: the adoption program, volunteer program and general support efforts by the Bureau of Land Management. A draft report will be submitted to the state legislature this session. Hearings throughout the senate and state assembly are underway with the Natural Resources Committee.

Steve Boies mentioned the number of wild horses currently held in facilities in Nevada and whether a saturation point has created a glut in the market. Bob Abbey replied the exact numbers are currently unspecified. The Nevada Bureau of Land Management is constructing a draft plan addressing land resource issues scheduled for review in March. The members of the Resource Advisory Council are encouraged to bring any comments and questions to the table, providing an opportunity to see first-hand which actions are proposed to the state within our jurisdiction. The adoption program cannot completely resolve the issue of overpopulation of wild horses and burros in Nevada. In cooperation with the immune/contraceptive vaccination, large numbers of wild horse herds could be more manageable. Approximately 23,000 wild horses are currently within Herd Management Areas statewide. This figure is based on a census performed over approximately a three-year period. About half of the Appropriate Management Levels (within Herd Management Areas) range between 8,000 to 8,500. An estimated 11,000 horses are within these Herd Management Areas, with roughly 3,000 exceeding set Appropriate Management Levels. The estimate within field offices state-wide has been tentatively identified at nearly 14,000. The recent attack against a wild horse

herd has impacted the local ranchers, the public and the Bureau of Land Management. The outpouring of grief and sorrow was felt world wide, attracting new attention to wild horse issues. Our ultimate goal is to sustain viable, healthy herds of wild horses and burros on public lands, while maintaining necessary land resources.

James Matheus described the balance of maintaining land resources and effective herd management considering the excessive numbers of wild horses. Bob Abbey emphasized the vitality of land resources is fundamental. Efforts to apply specific provisions of the Wild Horse and Burro Act such as maintaining healthy, vibrant herds and sustaining their resources proves to be a continuing challenge. Attempts are underway to evaluate and assess our ability to provide adequate sustenance to meet the increasing demands relative to this area.

Gene Kolkman discussed managing 2,500 wild horses over three million acres of Herd Management Areas. The gathering at the Monte Cristo Herd Management Area is reaching “carrying capacity” for the first time in thirty years. The next gather is in Sand Springs, Nye County. The area is considered a sensitive environment, an ephemeral range, with some structural problems and unreliable water resources. In the Caliente area approximately 300 head of wild horses, need designated Appropriate Management Levels. The committee is currently involved in preparations to establish that determination.

Jerry Smith reported approximately 4,147 wild horses and 64 burros have been tallied in the Battle Mountain district. Currently in the upper Shoshone/Eureka region, estimates are 3,434 wild horses/26 burros. The estimate at this time, in land use figures is approximately 3,917 wild horses/341 burros. There is excess of 200 wild horses from the projected Appropriate Management Levels and land use plans. In 1996, extensive wild horse gathers in Tonopah were based on drought conditions. The land resource is being recovered following closure.

Merlin McColm questioned the immune/contraceptive program, how it compliments or replaces the gather program. Bob Abbey replied it compliments the wild horse gather plan. One-year results reflect positive research; in the next two years significant reduction in excess numbers of wild horse herds is anticipated. The current expenditures are approximately sixty-two dollars for each immune/contraceptive injection compared to selective breeding, spaying and gelding which are less cost efficient. Every stud (five years and younger) removed from public lands is gelded before entering the adoption program. Utilizing the immune/contraceptive of the mare is much more effective and efficient than gelding the studs. Adoptable wild horses must be five years or younger. One of the recommendations of the state plan is to include the state prison system in training wild horses five years and older. This program is functioning in at least two other states; Wyoming and Colorado. The Rock Springs program involves the use of public funding in payment for the wild horse training.

DeLoyd Satterthwaite mentioned the regulations in Range Reform 94. The permittee must show improvement for the year or

an action will be taken against him/her in the following grazing season. Bob Abbey stated the Bureau of Land Management has specific limitations, internal policies, laws, budgets and various restrictions in which to operate. We need to “*Step up to the plate,*” by adhering to a continuous program for progress. The livestock permittee and the Bureau of Land Management are realizing improvements and remain focused on achieving goals toward progress. A proposal to lease some land in the Northern Arizona area will provide an alternative site as well as holding facilities for wild horses. In July 1999, a state-wide internal plan will be proposed for the Resource Advisory Council to provide feedback and comments on. One item features a down link satellite adoption program (from the Palamino Valley facilities), which extends to the national level. This will facilitate in identifying a market for adoptable wild horses. An 800 telephone number will be available in which to put in a bid for an adoptable wild horse. Implementing this procedure will reduce the cost of shipping and related expenses. Each potential adoptee is allowed up to four untitled wild horses according to current policy. Gene Kolkman stated the Bureau of Land Management is held accountable for each and every wild horse gathered or removed from public lands. Any action in relation to handling wild horses must be measured by overall benefit and effectiveness over and against any liability which may be incurred to the wild horse.

Steve Boies commented about increased public interest in adopting more than one wild horse. Current policy states each adoptee is entitled to adopt up to four wild horses. The question was raised over an outcry concerning a herd of wild horses which was supposedly destroying some private property and whether or not it was the same herd. Bob Abbey confirmed it was indeed the same herd. The reports are forthcoming on the state wide wild horse plans. The recommendations and concerns in taking an active and aggressive approach in setting Appropriate Management Levels is a top priority. As clarification in determining the evaluation process, in setting Appropriate Management Levels (with public consultation and input), it is established by use of the interdisciplinary evaluation Multiple Use Decision process. Helen Hankins described the process as similar to managing allotment evaluations and Multiple Use Decisions.

Eric Luse commented about data on the numbers of wild horses. The wild horse gather in the Antelope area is about 300 to 400 above the determined Appropriate Management Level. Overall the numbers are in excess of 600 to 800. Helen Hankins stated that within the Elko District, there are fewer wild horses than in the remainder of the state. Generally they are above by 300 to 400. There are specific problems with “checkerboard.”

Jerry Smith emphasized that each district is working very diligently to establish Appropriate Management Levels. An appreciable effort has been devoted to determining evaluations for each individual allotment within the Herd Management Areas. Presently, the projected forecast in Battle Mountain for the year 2003 is that each and every Allotment Management Level will be determined and assigned.

James Matheus expressed concern over the economics of the permittee with the assignment of Allotment Management Levels

and the reality of incurring any loss of revenue. Jerry Smith stated every scenario is taken into account. The evaluations take into consideration the ratio that has been established by our land planning group which reflects 20% wild horses and 80% livestock. Available forage corresponding to the number of wild horses and livestock in a particular allotment is taken into account in determining the land use plans. The performance of utilization studies is helpful. There is a dietary overlap between horses and livestock.

Gene Kolkman explained that when an area is encountered with livestock and wild horses, it will be about two years before the wild horses can be gathered. The first person to address is the permittee. Accommodations and adjustments are then allowed while negotiating with the ranchers and the Nevada Division of Wildlife.

Steve Boies noted the frustration of gathering, removing and replacing numbers of wild horses from one allotment to another, creating an imbalance in the population of adoptable wild horses.

Jerry Smith commented on the impact to rangeland resources in allowing wild horses to expire spontaneously. It has been three years since the Tonopah gather and land resources are still recovering. Patsy Tomera inquired about three allotments closed to wild horses and burros due to land degradation. Since it is an ephemeral range, scarce wildlife remains within the Southern Mohave area. Drought seems to be the standard condition in this area any increased population of wild horses is problematic. Herd Management Areas can be allocated to more suitable, manageable regions. The state Wild Horse Commission (through Cathy Barcomb), is in total agreement with zeroing out the unmanageable Herd Management Areas.

Brent Eldridge referred to the draft standards and guidelines of the Mohave Southern Resource Advisory Council. Dan Rathbun informed the council that a meeting is planned in March 1999, for the Mohave Southern Resource Advisory Council to convene in Las Vegas. Three new guideline proposals will be out for review at that time.

II. FIELD MANAGER REPORTS

Bob Edwards introduced the Sierra Pacific Power representative, John Owens. Overview of the proposal and project implementing 345,000 kilo volt (kv) line from the Falcon substation, via an overhead transmission line to Gonder. Two primary reasons for the project: 1) to increase reliability of electric transmissions and 2) to increase import capability to 250 mega watts. This will provide customers with new sources of power and basically complete the plan projecting forward ten years to meet future growth. Basic schedule will take ten months for construction within a one-year commitment. Ideally in 2001, construction will begin following existing lines 180 miles in length. The project consists of expanding the Gonder substation accommodating additional transformers with Y construction between those two points. John Owens described the various possibilities of the lines and facilities, pointing out existing Wilderness Study Areas. The environmental review process will determine the type of towers to be used. Self-weathering steel will minimize visual impact, guide lattice set steel

H frame towers vary in relation to type of terrain; could be 80 to 100 feet tall. A brief discussion on elements of electromagnetic fields led Patsy Tomera to question the feasibility of potential harm to birds. In order to provide some protection for the birds a “bird flight diver” (which is a colored wire) can be used.

Merlin McColm inquired about the progress in the Cottonwood allotment. Although there has been some improvement in management, it is in litigation at the Interior Board of Land Appeals. According to Jerry Smith a five year re-evaluation is due, at which time the Cottonwood allotment will be reassessed. Decisions have been issued on the Austin allotment; land use objectives reflect significant range improvement. In March 1999, a draft evaluation will be released on the Grass Valley allotment.

Bob Edwards asked about the status of the Department of Energy’s rail route through Crescent Valley and Cortez to Yucca Mountain. Jerry Smith said that the Department of Energy has included the Battle Mountain district and other field offices for consultation. Gene Kolkman explained there are three or four proposed routes under consideration and assessment as part of the feasibility reports. Congress will make the decisions whether or not to proceed from there.

Helen Hankins mentioned possible listing of the sage grouse as an endangered species. The Columbian spotted frog is also a threatened and endangered species.

Introduction of Pat Coffin with the Division of Fish and Wildlife. Pat Coffin mentioned a meeting in Idaho where sage grouse was a hot topic. Requests through Fish and Wildlife to petition any threatened endangered species must be substantial. The Bio-diversity Legal Fund has petitioned Fish and Wildlife for listing of sage grouse. As to the possibilities of enhancing sage grouse status and their ecological units, Lynn Huntsinger discussed habitat changes and susceptibility to ground predators.

Chairman Brent Eldridge invited any public comments and/or questions. There were none at this time.

Steve Boies asked about high levels of predation, factors influencing declining populations, observation sites of sage grouse, and strutting grounds.

Pat Coffin discussed the spotted frog agreement in the Toiyabe National Forest and subsequent signature through the public process. Cooperative ventures are underway with the Division of Wildlife to identify cycles, habitats and strutting grounds of sage grouse. Chris Mullen is the lead biologist working on the spotted frog issue. Merlin McColm mentioned that conservation efforts are always preferable to listing amphibians. One of the first indications of environmental problems is declining numbers of amphibians world wide. The spotted frog has two population groups in Nevada, the Toiyabe mountains and in the Columbia basin.

Helen Hankins made reference to her outline which was distributed. The Elko office is currently working on three Environmental Impact Statements which include three mining operations: Stock Operations area, Leaville area and an amendment or supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Post Betsy pit. These operations involve de-watering and examination of the cumulative the results of de-watering. The three Environmental Impact Statements will be ready as a preliminary draft in March or April. The potential outcome to cultural resources such as the Rock art area and the Toiyobe area are being investigated and researched. *This information and data is under review. These two particular areas are so important from a cultural resource standpoint, that the BLM is in the process of making a determination of eligibility as traditional, cultural properties and nomination on the National Register of Historical Sites.* This is similar to the process utilized in establishing Archeological sites on the National Register, with the exception of requesting multiple sites rather than a singular site.

Kathy Ataman mentioned the few places in the world that are so special they require protection, such as the Tosawihi Quarries. The role of the Bureau of Land Management in securing and protecting these historical resources is significant.

Helen Hankins stated that both areas are blanketed with mining claims and possessory quit claims to other individuals. One successful development is the cooperative agreement entered into by the Bureau of Land Management, mines, and Native American tribes and/or various counties to minimize degradation. An Area of Critical Environmental Concern requires a plan of operation. A brief overview on community based stewardship partnerships, upcoming meetings and outreach efforts on behalf of the Bureau of Land Management was highlighted. Bill Upton spoke briefly on environmental management which includes public participation.

Following a lunch recess Chairman Brent Eldridge directed the council to any additional comments/questions and Field Manager reports.

Gene Kolkman discussed the lands program and the thirty to forty assorted actions and two long-term programs between Lincoln County and White Pine County. The Rural Lands initiative on the Lincoln County side was discussed. This is pooling interested people in Lincoln County that want to acquire scattered tracks of public land who in turn exchange them for conservation easements for folks that want to sell them over in the Douglas County side. A feasibility report is awaiting approval or disapproval from Washington. It is still very early in the process, the public notifications of disposable lands and tracks will be forthcoming at the appropriate time. On the White Pine county side, the Three-C ranch is progressing.

Lynn Huntsinger questioned the sale of lands and requirements involved in the application process. Assessing the most valuable track of land should include: common uses, home construction, farming, agriculture expansion etc. Gene Kolkman explained the process and stated the factors to use in setting the criteria. Total demand right now in each county is about

30,000 acres.

Bob Abbey reviewed the Rural Lands Initiative in Douglas County and the Carson River Valley, which involves the purchase of conservation easements.

The Bureau of Land Management hopes to demonstrate the viability and introduce other counties to this workable solution instead of introducing sub-divisions. More contracted applications bring in local flavor and knowledge. Appraisals in rural areas find limited transactions and applications are based on comparable sales. Brief discussion on the appraisal process.

Kathy Atatman questioned whether the threatened and endangered species holds any value in economic or non-economic terms and the role of conservation easements. Brief discussion on the reviews by the State Inspector General's office, and land transactions in Clark county.

Steve Boies inquired about setting values on different parcels of land. Through the Rural Lands Initiative, the Bureau of Land Management is working with multiple contractors and bringing in the local flavor and knowledge to the values of property and public lands. Bob Abbey mentioned the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act which identifies disposable public lands for disposal and/or exchange.

Tebeau Piquet asked if there are any land use planning proposals with the local government. Gene Kolkman reported that every proposition that the Bureau of Land Management receives is submitted and reviewed before the county commission. Chairman Brent Eldridge remarked on recent recommendations for re-zoning designated lands into an industrial area. The Eureka and Lander counties are currently undergoing new land use plans. Lander is working with the state lands division on developing and revising their land use plans. They have identified particular lands of interest such as: Austin airport and surrounding lands in the vicinity. Certain Eureka County public lands have also been classified for disposal.

Gene Kolkman confirmed that the local White Pine County Technical Review team will submit the Elk plan to the agencies operating with the Bureau of Land Management. This plan originated with quite a diverse group of people and has been a work in progress for the last two and one-half years. The meetings started out fairly contentious. A mediator from Utah State University was requested to attend the first two meetings, she stated she would not return. Following, an additional facilitator was summoned then finally District Court Judge Dan Papez was called in to negotiate. Resolutions were successfully arrived at over the pertinent issues. The Rocky Mountain Elk foundation is providing funds for habitat improvement. This local team can refer to a state-wide, regional team to assist in reaching consensus and recommendations to the steering committee if the need should arise. The Lincoln County Elk Management plan is also nearing completion, expected to be submitted for publication within the next couple of months.

III. STANDARDS & GUIDELINES PINYON/JUNIPER

Gene Kolkman mentioned that there are three to four million acres of pinyon/juniper in varying stages of the ecological cycle within the Ely District. The Bureau of Land Management hopes to oversee this ecology, prevent mono-culture and re-establish the mosaic, providing for stable water shed etc. Some key issues for the Resource Advisory Council to consider are establishing a standard for the health of the ecosystem, encourage biological diversity of tree stands and restore under story vegetation. One goal in this RAC is to establish a standard that will address the biological diversity of these stands, what is the most optimal time in the succession process to intervene with fire or some other kind of treatment and open up debate and negotiations. Brief discussion on what defines healthy pinyon/juniper stands and ways to manage and maintain a balanced ecology. Kathy Ataman to research and form a subcommittee for developing the Standards and Guidelines on this subject. Possible presentation at the next RAC meeting.

Vince Garcia discussed the life cycle of pinyon/juniper stands and different means to harvest vegetation according to traditional beliefs of the Shoshone Native Americans. Various cultural practices include: seed harvesting on a lunar status, diverse historical uses in gathers, production, and the fire effects to pinyon/juniper stands.

Jeff Weeks commented on setting the standard for true woodland sites and invaded land sites. The size and diameter of trees, surrounding canopy and use of prescribed burns contribute to the ecology. Consultation of varying classes of guidelines based on surveys, evaluations, and any potential loss of AUM's.

Gene Kolkman explained the fire effects on the Mule Shoe area and Mt. Wilson expanse. Additional deliberation on establishing the Standards and Guidelines. Merlin McCollm included the increase/decrease in stream flow, water shed values, and how the trees furnish wildlife forages and provide woodland production. Further dialogue about what constitutes true woodland areas.

Chairman Brent Eldridge opened up discussion for the next Standards and Guidelines for non-renewable in mining and recreation.

IV. STANDARDS & GUIDELINES (NON-RENEWABLE)

Helen Hankins stated the draft regulations and accompanying Environmental Impact Statement and public comment period closes May 10, 1999. A public hearing in Elko is upcoming on March 25, 1999.

Bill Upton asked about: reclamation, vegetation, bonding, performance, water quality, hydrology, de-watering, and existing

modifications. Bob Abbey said the regulations are being finalized. A report will be forwarded back to Congress in March.

V. WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

Bob Abbey reviewed the introduction of congressional legislation in establishing the number of Wilderness Study Areas. In 1964, the approval of the Wilderness Study Area Act created a national preservation system. Section 2C defined specific criteria which stipulates there must be 5,000 acres of road-less land. From 1980 - 1991 the area was studied for land use. Potential Wilderness Study Areas were reviewed by all state agencies including the Bureau of Mines. In 1991, a nine volume report was completed. Reference was made to distributed materials highlighting the recommendations and decisions from Congress which include: 1) no time limit, 2) can designate Wilderness, 3) can release Wilderness Study Areas. In summary, a completed, inventoried public lands and Wilderness Study Area report was forwarded with results to Congress which are open to public discussion and comment.

Bill Upton asked which criteria apply under the Clean Air Act. Steve Smith mentioned the reports, representative areas, ecosystems, energy and mineral potential, notebooks and three page synopsis. There are seven maps for each Wilderness Study Area. Management plans for Wilderness Study Areas include keeping vehicles out of the areas.

Bob Abbey stated that there are 5.1 million acres, which are managed by the Bureau of Land Management; some must define solitude. *"God does not create wilderness Congress does."* The Bureau of Land Management has met every criteria and needs closure on this issue.

Chairman Brent Eldridge and the RAC members decided on the next Resource Advisory Council meeting, location, and tour. A decision was made to convene for two days in Eureka on Friday, May 14 and Saturday, May 15, 1999. The meeting will be held at the Eureka Opera House on May 14, beginning at 9:00 a.m., with a tour of the Fish Creek Herd Management Area on May 15, 1999. Conclusion of the North Eastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council meeting.